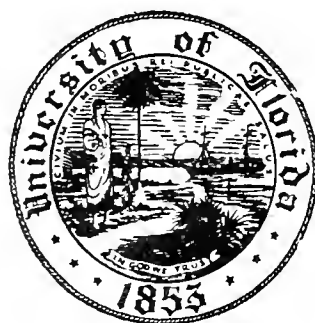


The Modern Mother's Dilemma

Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg

△  
396  
689m

UNIVERSITY  
OF FLORIDA  
LIBRARIES



COLLEGE LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

# **THE MODERN MOTHER'S DILEMMA**

**BY SIDONIE MATSNER GRUENBERG  
AND HILDA SIDNEY KRECH**

**PUBLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLET NO. 247**



396

G689m

## the public affairs committee

This pamphlet is one of a series published by the Public Affairs Committee, a nonprofit educational organization whose purpose is to make available in summary and inexpensive form the results of research on economic and social problems to aid in the understanding and development of American policy.

Erling M. Hunt, Chairman  
Telford Taylor, Vice Chairman  
Maxwell S. Stewart, Secretary  
Beulah Amidon, Treasurer  
Theodore Abel  
Ethel P. Alpenfels  
Eleanor C. Anderson  
Francis J. Brown  
Stuart W. Cook  
C. Ward Crampton, M.D.  
Robert E. Cushman  
Hubert T. Delany

Samuel H. Flowerman  
Roma Gans  
Sidonie M. Gruenberg  
George T. Guernsey  
Howard Henderson  
William L. Holland  
F. Ernest Johnson  
Otto Klineberg  
Harry W. Laidler  
Benson Y. Landis  
Granville Larimore, M.D.

Alfred McClung Lee  
Edward S. Lewis  
Edwin J. Lukas  
Robert M. MacIver  
Robert McDevitt  
Maurine B. Neuberger  
Ernest G. Osborne  
Robert H. Reid  
Leo Rosten  
Mark Starr  
Wellman J. Warner

Maxwell S. Stewart, Editor  
Mabel C. Mount, Managing Editor



*Copyright 1957, by the Public Affairs Committee, Inc. First Edition, March, 1957.*



# THE MODERN MOTHER'S DILEMMA

BY SIDONIE MATSNER GRUENBERG  
AND HILDA SIDNEY KRECH

*Sidonie Gruenberg and Hilda Krech are a well-known mother-daughter writing team. They are co-authors of the book, The Many Lives of Modern Woman (Doubleday, 1952). Mrs. Gruenberg was formerly Director of the Child Study Association of America and is Editor of The Encyclopedia of Child Care and Guidance (Doubleday, 1954). . . . The drawings are by Lois Fisher.*

WHEN "the modern woman's dilemma" crept into public discussion well before the turn of the century, the subject concerned the "cultivated" woman, the one who had managed to receive an education of a kind previously reserved for men. Even today, in England and in the Scandinavian countries the talk is largely about "the university woman."

In America, however, the concern is not with "the educated woman" alone. It is shared by many, many women who have received little or no higher education, who have had rather routine, unglamorous jobs before their children were born. For women of all types and temperaments have been stimulated by the sights and sounds of our civilization, by our political, social, and economic issues as well as by our sports and our entertainments. They have begun to wonder whether marriage and motherhood are all-consuming. Though their families come first with them, they long to use some of their other abilities and to play a significant part in the world outside the home.

Even those women who find running a home and caring for small children completely satisfying often receive a rude shock later in their lives. If they have devoted all their energy to the one task of creating happy homes and raising children, they are at loose ends when their children no longer need them full time. And when children leave home for college, for marriage, or for jobs, these mothers (still young, still strong, energetic, and capable) are often left with feelings of uselessness.

If women in large numbers feel vaguely dissatisfied and disappointed at not having a chance to go on with interests they developed before marriage, the number of men and children who will suffer as a result is beyond estimation. And if the talents of women are wasted, we all lose.

## **WHAT IS THE PROBLEM, EXACTLY?**

We cannot hope to find a really workable solution for today's mothers until we first take a calm look at what it is that is disturbing them. Their problem is not only the very real one of finding time and energy to do more than care for their homes and their children. They are disturbed by the very *wish* to do more and to have more than they already do and have. Some of them, indeed, feel guilty if they long to get out of the house once in a while and work with other adults. For, if they do, they are told that they *prefer* outside activities to the children because "they are unconsciously rejecting" their children.

The healthy woman knows that this is not true. It is ludicrous even to compare the rewards one gets from work or hobbies with the deep and rich rewards, the ever-new delight one's own children give! Yet the idea is prevalent that a woman who really loves her children must enjoy their company twenty-four hours a day, that she would cheerfully choose this in preference to any other way of spending her time — ever.

This is not an exaggeration even though, more and more, we are recognizing the problem and considering ways of meeting it —



especially in urban centers. But because the notion is still prevalent that it is unwomanly for a mother to think about having interests beyond her home and because for so many women there is no guidance, they are in effect reduced to this unrealistic choice: A mother must either devote herself utterly and completely to her children, or else admit that her aspirations — however modest — are selfish and unmotherly. In much that is said on this subject there is the implication — sometimes the explicit assertion — that “motherhood is a full-time job.” The question, even today, is phrased “home *or* career.”

The choice thus pressed on most women is unfair and unrealistic for the following reasons.

Few, if any, enjoy unrelieved housework and the undiluted companionship of even the most adorable children. It is wrong and not at all helpful to raise doubts about the quality of a woman’s “motherhood” each time she longs for adult companionship.

Furthermore, it is utterly false to assume or to imply that women hanker after “outside” activity as an alternative to their family life. Most women want families first, and the other things in addition. The outside pursuits which are available to most women may seem trivial if one is forced to choose them to the exclusion of “home and children.” And they are usually presented in their most trivial aspects while home-making is presented in its most inspiring phase. “Why should she prefer addressing envelopes for the Red Cross to her own children?” we are asked.

The individual woman wants to take part in what goes on around her in order to live life more fully and to contribute to it signifi-



cantly. If we wish to evaluate her outside pursuits, we must ask the question this way: "What has her work for the Red Cross contributed to her as a person as well as to her community?"

Women with talents and aspirations for a real career — in medicine, law, business, scholarship, or in one of the arts — have to make a real choice. If they give up their careers, they have a fairly clear idea of what they are giving up. If they choose to go on with them, career women have special problems of their own.\* But the successful career woman is tolerated and even accepted by the public. Her efforts are patently worth while. While she doesn't spend as much time with her children as does an ordinary mother, the public recognizes that her children get some values and benefits through having for their mother a competent musician, doctor, or public servant.

### **no clear-cut choice**

The problem we are discussing here, however, is that of the woman who has no clear-cut choice, no technical training, no shining talent, yet who yearns vaguely for "something."

The *either-or* choice is unfair and unrealistic because it is unwholesome for a child to have his mother constantly and completely wrapped up in his hopes and little disappointments, his every move and reaction.

We cannot expect the home to contribute enough to the education of the child if the mother's interests scarcely reach beyond the home except through TV and the table talk of her husband.

What do we expect the mother to contribute to her children's growth in taste and appreciation, in their outlook upon the world, if she operates only with what she brought with her from her childhood home and schooling?

It is not good for children, particularly as they grow older, to have mother forever "available" to them, so that they never have to do their own errands, nor share the responsibilities of the home.

What indeed happens to the mother who has given herself so un-

---

\* See *Working Wives and Mothers*, by Stella Applebaum. Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 188. Twenty-five cents.



swervingly and so unstintingly to her children that she has forsaken all other pursuits? Through her selflessness and devotion she has caused her other talents to shrivel. She was expected to be a full-time mother; she has been praised for being a full-time mother. Yet now that her children are teen-age and older, she is called a "Mom!" She is the cause of her children's irresponsibility, and now is criticized for fastening herself on her children, for living her life out through them.

What is she supposed to do now? She is probably somewhere in her forties. For most women, that is rather late to start from scratch — to develop their interests, serve as apprentices, and learn good working habits. Yet she is far too young to say. "Well, this is it. I have done my job, served my function. Life is nearly over now." A woman in her forties today can expect up to twenty-five or more years of activity, usefulness, and joy in life.

What many seem to have forgotten, somewhere along the line, is that *to be a complete mother, one must also be a complete woman*. For the sake of children and husband, as well as for herself as a person, a woman must develop more than the housewifely and maternal side of her nature. Yet, simple though this may sound, it is not an easy thing to do. It is not easy to juggle time and energy and attention in an efficient way. It is not easy to keep one's goal clearly in sight through the myriad demands of home and children.

## **WHAT'S NEW ABOUT BEING A MOTHER?**

The feminists thought that they had settled the question of woman's role long ago, but modern mothers are not feminists. They are not out to prove that women are at least as good as men. Since mothers, as such, are nothing new in the world, we have to ask what it is in modern life that started tongues wagging and emotions churning all over again.

The first thing that usually comes to mind, when comparing today's mothers with the mothers of two or three generations ago is that a larger proportion than ever before have attended college. This does

not mean that all college alumnae are highly intellectual or highly trained. Many attended college in a rather perfunctory way, without taking on too much learning or wisdom. Yet they shared the world of men, were exposed to ideas, to stimulating experiences, and to a chance to find out what they can do.

### **she has been out in the world**

A large number of today's mothers whether or not they have been to college, have had jobs of one sort or another before they married. Few of these jobs can be dignified by the name "career" — or even "training." Nevertheless, no matter how simple, monotonous, or humble their tasks were, they had the stimulation of working with other people. It's not alone the companionship, though that is very important, but the being part of a larger project (whether it is

putting out a magazine, running a nursery school, or keeping an office going) that gives a sense of sharing in some achievement.

Keeping a home going is, to be sure, the most important if not the largest project! But it doesn't always seem that way to the woman left alone at the sink. The woman at the typewriter (who may be doing the office equivalent of dish-washing) develops and maintains a relationship with other adults who share at least some of her daily concerns. The frequent praise (or blame) of her boss, the efforts of her colleagues remind her that what she is doing counts.



Most women who have been to college or have had jobs before they became mothers miss the companionship of men and of other women in their daily tasks.

Many miss, as well, a standard by which to judge their work. They feel somewhat at sea without a chance to see how their work compares with, or at least fits in with, the work of their colleagues.

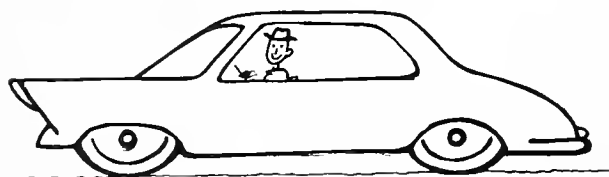
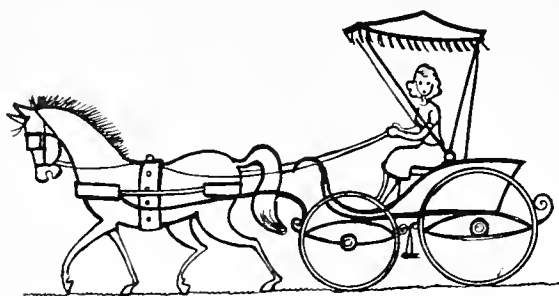
### **she was not trained for domesticity**

During those early years the typical modern woman received a minimum of training in the so-called domestic arts. She feels, therefore, that she is now at a double disadvantage: she is called upon to do work for which she was not adequately trained while being denied a chance to do work in which she has had experience and in which she may have developed a good deal of skill. This feeling often exists whether a woman has been a salesgirl, a secretary, a teacher, a photographer's model, or a Ph.D.

Of course, this is not invariably the case. There are women today, as there have been through the ages, who have grown up helping with the care of children and the house, who have always known that their chief task in days to come would be caring for their own families and running their own households. These women may even be in the majority so far as numbers go; but these are not the women who are causing all the concern. It is, in a sense, the more privileged women who now find themselves facing a dilemma, the women who were "spared" household chores in their youth, who were given certain advantages or, at the very least, a chance to find out what other things they could do.

This is pretty generally recognized now. And for those who see only this part of the picture, the solution seems very simple. Take away the "advantages," they are saying. Since women are to cook and clean, to raise their children, market for food, and balance the budget, don't give them too much schooling. Or, if they must be educated, don't teach them history, literature, or political science; give them only courses in cooking, cleaning, marketing, child care, and budget balancing. This line of reasoning sometimes continues with the proposition that, since women were more content in the days when they wove their own cloth, baked their own bread, and preserved their own vegetables, today's women should go back to weav-

ing, baking, and canning. This idea seems sensible and logical to many people. Others find it impractical, if not actually ludicrous.



They feel that women cannot be expected to live in a home-spun, home-preserves age while the husbands of these women are living in a dacron, deep-freeze age. It would be like asking them to ride in horse-drawn buggies once more while their husbands rode around in the latest model cars.

On the spiritual level, they recognize that modern women cannot

be looked upon solely as the runners of the household; they are, after all, the wives and partners of modern men, the mothers of today's children. They are, incidentally, voting citizens. They cannot be kept in ignorance, geared to the ideas of a past age.

But, says the first group, if we educate women and let them become related to the outside world, they feel dissatisfied and cramped when expected to take their rightful place inside the home.

And so the argument goes round and round in circles, getting nowhere. To find a clue for a more practical, more satisfactory solution to the problem, we have to look beyond the *either-or* alternatives.

### **"a good mother"**

One of the most significant, yet one of the least recognized features of modern motherhood, is that there is no generally accepted standard. In the past there were individualists, even eccentrics, but on the whole people understood one another when they spoke of "a good mother." They meant a woman who raised her brood of children (usually a fairly large-sized brood) and who made a good home for them and her husband. Since she continued to bear children until middle-age, her oldest sons and daughters were likely to be married and have children of their own by the time her youngest no longer needed her daily ministrations. And, since young couples tended to

set up their new homes fairly near the homes of their parents, she had a chance to be an active, participating grandmother. Today many grandmothers live far from their grandchildren and are only visitors in their lives.

The large-size family also meant that, without theorizing about it, a mother taught her children responsibility. A girl just naturally learned the traditional household skills. The world of household and children was her world; if she was a fairly well-adjusted individual she felt at home in that world and yearned for no other.

### **new designs for living**

Why is the picture so different today? Why does the woman who acquired standards at college and on the job have no clear-cut definition of what it means to be a good mother? Even the girls who have had a chance to learn from their mothers and from experience with younger brothers and sisters cannot be sure of their standards under living conditions that are so different from those of their own girlhood. The present generation of young mothers has grown up in a welter of traditions that conflict not only with one another but with the growing body of professional knowledge.

*The size of the family varies.* Many couples plan their families today and, by choice, have one, two, or three children. Some have five or more children. We can no longer speak of the typical American family as having one boy and one girl. There is more variety in our modes of living. Suburban living, for example, has been with us on a large scale for only two or three generations. It has put many a good mother constantly behind the wheel of a car, doing family errands, so that it is impossible for her to be "always at home—where every good mother should be."

Apartment house living has also increased enormously in the past two generations. An apartment-house mother may or may not have a car to do the family errands, but neither can she watch her children through the window while doing her household chores. The "good apartment-house mother" takes her small children to the park or playground each day for fresh air and exercise. She rarely bakes



bread or cans fruit or vegetables; but she may attend every PTA meeting of her children's school.

Meanwhile, other good mothers in more rural communities, are still baking and canning as mothers used to do. And in still other areas, housing developments, relatively new in our society, have brought other customs, new norms for those who live in them. People are brought into close contact with their neighbors and must learn to cooperate with them — or at least to get along with them. But, unlike the neighbors who grew up together in the old-fashioned small town, these people are all new to one another. And in many cases they are neighbors only transiently.

*Widespread migrations have brought new ways of living.* Not only in housing developments, but in every kind of urban and suburban community, a large proportion of the people living there have come from somewhere else. Few children grow up in the same place where one or both parents grew up before them. Certain old standards are dropped by the wayside. Certain new ones emerge to fit the new situation. The moves and the changes are bound to have an effect on the family's way of life, particularly upon the mother's role in it.

Relatively few women today, for example, have parents, in-laws, or other relations to step in and help when a new baby arrives or in some other emergency. The very fact that the word "sitter" is so new in our language points to the ways things operated in former times. In the days of big families and old communities, there was always someone in the family or close by to lend a hand in small or large emergencies. Today, elaborate arrangements with a sitter often have to be made in advance if a mother wants to keep a dental appointment.

On the other hand, women are playing a more significant part in the community — both in the older communities and in the new ones. Many mothers work hard and long for better schools and playgrounds, for pure water supplies, for community measures to improve mental health. They tend to think of this work as part of their role as a mother.

Others, however, see these efforts only as projects which take mothers away from their homes and their children. They feel that a woman can be a good mother only if she is devoted solely to her children and their immediate welfare. She must be available to them at all times, ready to be their playmate and confidante as well as mother. Many, many women have chosen this interpretation of their role. For one woman it may be because, having been a good student or a good secretary, she is now self-consciously determined to be a good mother. For another woman, one with very few children, it may be because she feels she must make up to them for the lack of brothers and sisters. Then, too, a great do-it-yourself enthusiasm is sweeping the country so that many women would consider themselves almost "failures" if they got help with their housework, child care, gardening, or errands.

Some women, however, feel that they cannot do justice to their children and their families unless they do justice to themselves as adult persons; and this they cannot do unless they continue in some activities outside their homes. Still others find that, for the welfare of the family, they must take paying jobs outside the home. Sometimes it is because the husband is ill or poorly paid; sometimes it is



because a woman is widowed or divorced. Very often these women manage to do well in their jobs and to be good mothers at home. *Women live longer, look younger, feel healthier* today than ever before. They have a bonus of twenty or more years beyond what their grandmothers had. But they have no precedent to guide them, no tradition or pattern for these later years that seems natural and right. Old-time grandmothers had work to do and a role to play all their days. Today's older mothers and young grandmothers find themselves out of a job.\*

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

The first thing to do is to recognize a simple but generally ignored fact:

*There are more ways than one to be a good mother.* We have long ago accepted the fact that there are more ways than one to be a good child; no longer is the docile angel everyone's ideal. The concept of "individual differences" has become increasingly accepted, so that there is room in our hearts and in our admiration for all kinds of children. Most of them have their faults, to be sure, but we can accept as thoroughly satisfactory children of a very wide variety.

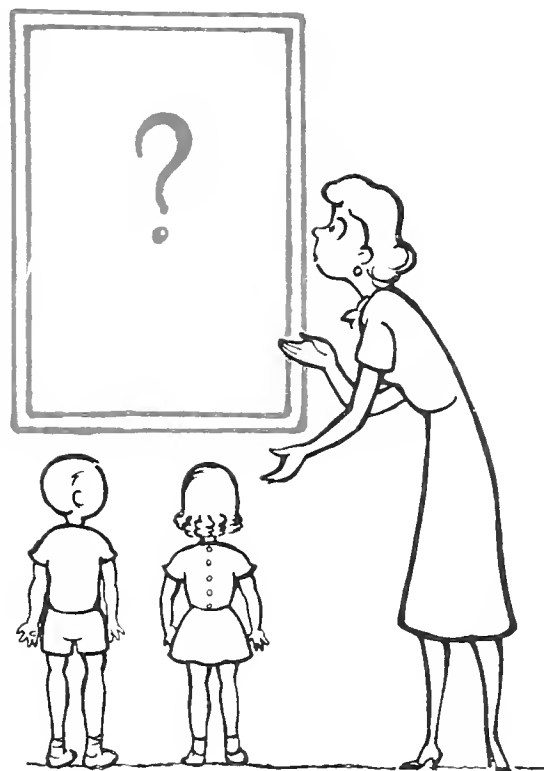
Surely, we must recognize that these individual children will grow up into various kinds of adults. The girls will inevitably grow up to be different kinds of mothers. Many people are confused by the fact that there are such different ways of being "a thoroughly satisfactory" mother; but if we truly accept the concept of individual differences in children we must take the next step and recognize legitimate differences in adults — even mothers!

It is rather convenient for a woman to have a clear-cut picture to guide her as to "what every good mother should be." But we have learned — sometimes to our dismay — that there is no neat picture that will fit the complex, changing pattern of today's life.

Difficult as it is, each mother today must work out her own design

---

\* See *How to Be a Good Mother-in-law and Grandmother*, by Edith Neisser. Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 174. Twenty-five cents.



for living, taking into account, not only her individual talents and tastes, her temperament and training, but also countless other factors which help to shape her life, making it in some respects different from any other.

How many children does she have? Are her children healthy? Or is one or more handicapped in some way, in need of special help?

Where does she live — east, west, middle-west, north, south? in a big city, middle-sized city, small town, suburb? housing development, apartment house, ranch-type house, or farm?

At what age did she marry? Old enough so that she's had some experience, a chance to find out what's going on outside her home, what people are doing, what kinds of things she herself can do? Or at a very young age, as many girls do these days? In that case she will still be young and fairly adaptable when she has more time on her hands. But this is the time for her to find out where her abilities and interests lie so that she will have some idea in which direction to turn later on.

What work does her husband do? What special demands does it make on her, and in what special ways does it affect the family's daily life?

What opportunities does her particular community offer — in the way of jobs or other activities, in the way of facilities or help in child-care, housework, shopping, transporting children?

Each woman has to be imaginative and resourceful as she tries to find her own way. Furthermore, she has to find her way *as she goes along*. For a woman's work, and indeed her whole life, changes so radically as her children progress from babyhood to teen-age and beyond, that sometimes she can hardly think of herself as the same woman at these various stages.

### **different phases in life**

The second thing we have to do, therefore, is this: *Develop a sense of perspective; recognize that woman's life typically falls into several distinct phases.*

Many of the people who have tried to help women find their way have simply added to the confusion by speaking of "the mother of young children" and "the woman with grown children" as though these were two separate, distinct human beings. They scold the young mother for being interested in anything but her young children; they

scold the woman with grown children for clinging to her sons and daughters, for having no other concerns. There is no warning that the mother of young children becomes — in a remarkably short time — the woman with grown children!

If our counselors would bear this simple fact in mind, they would help the lost woman immeasurably. And if each woman groping for a way of life for herself could develop a sense of perspective, she will have gone a long way toward clearing her own path.



Shakespeare long ago gave us the concept of the seven stages of man. In strictly masculine terms, he described the parts played by "each man in his time." It would not have been particularly dramatic if he had described the stages in feminine terms for, at that time, before the Industrial Revolution, girls and women from all social classes lived a domestic sort of life. As now, they grew older and proceeded from girlhood to womanhood, on to old age, but, except for this, there were no drastic changes from stage to stage.

Today, the roles from stage to stage are more distinctive for girls and women than they are for boys and men. To be sure, the differences are not significant during infancy and childhood, even toward the end of life. But a young man, from the time he acquires his trade or profession, typically continues in the same role through his middle years, perhaps rising in rank with experience and responsibility, and probably earning more money as he goes along.

It matters to a father whether he comes home to a house full of small children or of middle-aged children, or to a home from which the grown children have gone off on their own. But it does not make a difference in his daily work, in the way he spends his hours between breakfast and dinner.

For his wife it is quite another story. In her very early adult life, she gets one kind of training at college or on a job. In the early days of her motherhood, she plays a new and quite unique role. She is called upon to abandon much of her early training and to become proficient in entirely different tasks.

Then, by the time she becomes really skilled and at ease in the mother-housewife role, she is in another distinct stage in which she can enjoy her children more and live with them in a new way.

This stage does not last long, however, for almost before she knows it, her nest is empty. A large part of her job as practicing mother



is over *and she has no other!* Yet she has before her the prospect of twenty or more vigorous years for which she is not prepared.

The amazing thing is not that this happens and keeps on happening, but that each girl —and, later, each woman — is so surprised! If each girl could be helped to see what lay in store for her, she could make some effort at understanding children and acquire some proficiency at the household arts while she was still young. Perhaps these things cannot be learned most effectively from courses at high school and college, but such courses do have real value.

Both children and parents would gain if boys and girls were no longer shielded from the various chores and jobs that have to be done to keep a home going. Young people would develop more responsible attitudes, as well as necessary skills, if they were expected to do their share.

But it isn't necessary for a girl to learn everything at mother's knee. A mother can guide her daughter but, knowing that relations between mothers and teen-age daughters may be very tense, she might well look beyond the home. She can guide her daughter into



all sorts of baby-sitting jobs — those with more emphasis on the baby and a little less on the sitting!

Later on, a girl would be eligible for a more responsible job as a “mother’s helper.” If people generally saw how deeply important such work is for the girl herself as well as for the fortunate mother she helps, this job would acquire more status and dignity instead of being looked upon as casual or trivial. Surely, it is absurd to consider the job of apprentice mother suitable for a cheerful girl of low mentality while the job of apprentice salesgirl goes to the *cum laude* girl. This attitude hardly fits in with the loud and frequent exhortations to harrassed young mothers: Remember that motherhood is the greatest job of all!

There are other ways, too. At many universities and colleges, groups of girl students keep house together, taking turns at the various tasks. Students adopt such arrangements in most cases for purely financial reasons. Parents wish their girls didn’t “have to” do it; they wish they could afford the regular dormitories. But it might be constructive if this were the regular thing, not an exception. Here is “an extra-curricular activity” in which parents and their daughters could be sure that the time and energy were being well spent. It should not be difficult to interest young girls in this kind of work. They *want* someday to have homes and families of their own. It would be good to help these girls feel prepared for them.

### **developing perspective**

Meanwhile, the bogged-down young housewife needs help in developing a sense of perspective. It is very difficult for her to see herself as anything else. She can barely get through today, much less look at next year. But she must be helped to see that, in all likelihood, she will reach the ripe old age of forty-five. And she must be helped to see that forty-five isn’t so terribly old any more, that she will have energy and enthusiasm and will want something worthwhile on which to spend them. If she can be helped to see this, if her husband and the others around her really see it, then her short excursions into the outside world will no longer seem absurd.

It is still extremely difficult for a busy young housewife to "keep her hand in" her old field of interest or activity or to develop new skills and interests. It is possible only if she — and others — recognize that it is worth while. During the peak years of home activities and responsibility she might even put her outside interests on ice. But she will feel more content, far less bogged-down, if she knows that in a very few years she will take them out again.

Among the hardest things for today's housewife to face is the fact that she is exposed to criticism no matter what she does.

It is hard enough to feel the silent reproaches of "what everybody expects," but it is far worse to feel the disapproval of one's husband. It is especially difficult where wife and husband had both been working before their marriage and where the work experience has given the woman a taste of the possibilities beyond the horizons of house-keeping. Such criticism is likely to be shattering to her dreams.

In fact, it is hardly possible to clarify the situation of today's mother without looking more closely at that very important man, her husband.

### **the new role of the father**

Gone, of course, is the picture of Father who is nothing more than the family breadwinner and stern disciplinarian. Almost as quaint is the picture of a Dad who has no use for his tiny children, but is anxiously waiting for the day when he can take his son to a baseball game. Fathers get to know their children early these days, certainly in the first months and years when the whole family's life revolves around the needs and personalities of the little children.\*

In today's family set-up few, if any, fathers can be shielded from the noise and confusion that greet them when they come home from a day at work. There are no maiden aunts or miscellaneous cousins living in the house — nor nurses or hired girls — to whisk the baby off to bed, to settle a squabble between the older children, or to give them an early supper. The typical father of today comes home from

---

\* See *Making the Grade as Dad*, by Walter and Edith Neisser. Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 157. Twenty-five cents.



work to find his wife trying to do all these things and a few more. The mother is simply unable to cope with the situation alone and her husband lends a helping hand.

Today's father has not made a self-conscious effort to modify his masculine role; he has pitched in through sheer force of circumstances. His attitude toward sharing with his partner the responsibilities of family life has changed decidedly since his father's time. In the effort to help his wife, the modern father has learned to bathe children and wash dishes, sometimes even to cook and to run the vacuum cleaner.



Some very real benefits have come about through this change in attitude. Couples do feel closer and enjoy their children more when they are genuinely a *mutual* concern. In fact, the whole family is closer these days. Boys and girls thrive through having the companionship, the loving care of a male parent as well as the female one. There is no doubt that these are *plus* factors. But it is necessary to put out some warning signals, too.

### **still the main breadwinner**

First of all, let it not be forgotten that Father is still the breadwinner. Even where the wife works and the family has two salaries, he is — in all but the rarest of cases — the *main* breadwinner. This doesn't mean that his is necessarily the larger salary, though it usually is. His is the chief and *continuous* responsibility.

Many a woman feels that as men now cooperate and share in the housework, they should share it 50/50. Since, however, the husbands usually put in a full day on their regular jobs, this is a lot to expect!

Wives don't mean to be unfair. It is easy to understand that, after a day of sheer harrassment, a woman feels: I've had them all day;

you've had a relatively peaceful day at the office, store or factory; now you take over. Often a husband can and will gladly take over the children while his wife gets supper ready. It is the best time of day for him to visit with his children, as well as being the worst time of day for Mother. The thing for Mother to bear in mind is that her husband can't be asked to take over too much.

We can never go back to the old idea that "A man's home is his castle." Even in England, where the saying started, things have been moving along rapidly — and in the same direction as here. But a man's home should be a place of *some* refreshment after a day at work. People joke about a man being glad to go back to the peace and quiet of his job on Monday morning after a weekend at home. Sometimes there is too much truth in this to be a joke. Expecting the husband to do half of the housework as well as carry the load of a full-time job is more than unfair; it prevents him from doing his best work and keeps him from enjoying his home as he should.

One reason why many men are not at all enthusiastic about the idea of their wives' branching out (whether into the community, into one of the art fields, or into a part-time job) is that they fear that this will mean an even heavier load for *them*. If women are to solve their problems, they need their husbands' cooperation but they must see to it that "cooperation" does not mean the husbands' taking over more than their share of housework and children. Just what that rightful share *is* we cannot precisely define. Each couple has to work out a way that is right for *them*.

### **the need for understanding**

Nevertheless, a woman does need her husband's cooperation. She needs, first of all, her husband's understanding, his full appreciation of what it is that makes her long for some outside activity. She needs also a husband's encouragement, an occasional reminder that her efforts are worthwhile and will add up over the years to something of value to both of them.

It is, after all, to each husband's advantage that his wife become something in addition to a housewife. When they were first married,

very probably they had a great deal more in common than their physical attraction to one another. Most young couples today meet at school or at college or on the job. They have common interests and mutual respect. They are friends and companions and co-workers, as well as lovers. Yet when they become parents, if they become *too* absorbed in their children, they may find, in time, that they have little else in common.

This is unthinkable to a happy young couple. But as the years go by, they have little time alone. If they spend that time talking almost exclusively about maintaining their household and managing their children, they will eventually find, when their children are grown, that they have no other concerns in common. Presumably, there is the husband's work which the wife can share vicariously; but many a husband has long ago stopped telling his wife about life or his job because he didn't want a counter-barrage of household trivia! What, then, can be done to keep their companionship alive and growing as the family grows?

## **DEVELOPING AS A COUPLE**

It is not merely for the *future*, when the little ones have left the nest, but for the continuously enjoyable *present* that every couple needs a chance to develop their relationship as a couple. They need time together and leisure together so they may continue to know and appreciate the individual persons they are; it is not enough to remember the sweethearts they *were*. This does not mean that they will forget their children, forget that they are parents, even for a little while. But it does mean that during these short intervals of recreation they will not think of one another primarily as parents — but as the man and woman who care enough for one another to spend their lives together.

“But it's not easy to find the time and the money to go off alone together,” says the typical young couple. “In fact, it's impossible.”

Of course, it is difficult. But when people really know what they want and why they want it, they are remarkably ingenious about

finding a way to get it. In one community two enterprising families began “trading children” — at first, just for afternoons, then for evenings, and then for whole weekends. One couple had three children, the other had two. This discrepancy didn’t bother them at all. They felt that once five children were involved, it scarcely mattered who contributed two and who contributed three. If anything, it was a little more difficult for the couple with only two children; they had less room at home and were less used to handling “groups.” And so they made an “even trade” and both couples soon got used to handling groups!

About once a month one of the couples took care of all five children while the other had the weekend to themselves. Sometimes they did nothing more glamorous than stay at home and paint the children’s furniture. But it was quite a different project from doing it with little children around; and the whole weekend had a relaxed, honeymoon air. Sometimes they went fishing or camping.

“But,” say the very modern young people in indignation, “that’s the kind of thing we do as a family.”

Yes, that’s wonderful. But sometimes it’s nice to do it as a couple.



Once a year each of the couples splurged and went to the nearby city. They went to art museums or plays or concerts; they had dinner at a restaurant; and they stayed overnight at a hotel. It was expensive, to be sure, but it cost no more than they would have spent on some other form of entertainment; and they felt that for a long-term investment it meant more to them than a very nice party. Indeed, they had noticed that at too many gatherings in their group, the men would drift off by themselves, leaving the women to talk recipes and children.

So successful were these outings that friends and neighbors began to take up the idea. Now several families "trade children" among themselves. This practice turned out to be of benefit not only to the parents, but especially so to the children. Boys and girls can find out that there is more than one way to fix potatoes and even hamburgers, more than one way to make a bed, even more than one way to be tucked into bed. They learn that there are different kinds of mothers and fathers, different ways of having fun, different interpretations of "discipline." Children from small families get a taste of big-family life, with its give and take and rough and tumble.

There are, of course, other ways if trading children isn't practicable. Qualified persons can take over occasionally for a few days — often a young grandmother, sometimes a responsible college girl. A mother would naturally want to know to whom she entrusts her children; but she can easily become acquainted if she hires a prospect as a sitter for short periods in the usual way. In any case, every couple must truly realize how important it is for them to *invest in themselves*. When they feel this, they can usually find the means.

### **a chance to develop as a person**

With many couples today, the man has a chance to develop his potentialities through his work and his outside associates, while the woman has little opportunity to develop more than the maternal and domestic side of her personality. It is true that the maternal side of a woman's nature yields the deepest satisfactions, not only in the early years but throughout her life. And the most frequent if not the

severest frustrations in women are among those who could never develop this aspect of life. But any woman who spends her twenties and thirties on "child care" in the narrow sense is likely to find herself ill-equipped for a rich, useful, and truly satisfying life during her forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies. This, as we have already indicated, is not only hard on her, but hard also on her husband and children.

What can she do? The first thing to do is to recognize that while the children are small she may have to do the thing she likes on a small scale. If she married young, she might, during these early years, find out what gives her the most satisfaction, what kinds of work she is good at.

This does not call for systematic research or exploration. It means simply being aware of her need and awake to what is going on, what is being done. One learns through newspapers and books and movies, through an occasional lecture, through taking part in some voluntary enterprise in the neighborhood.

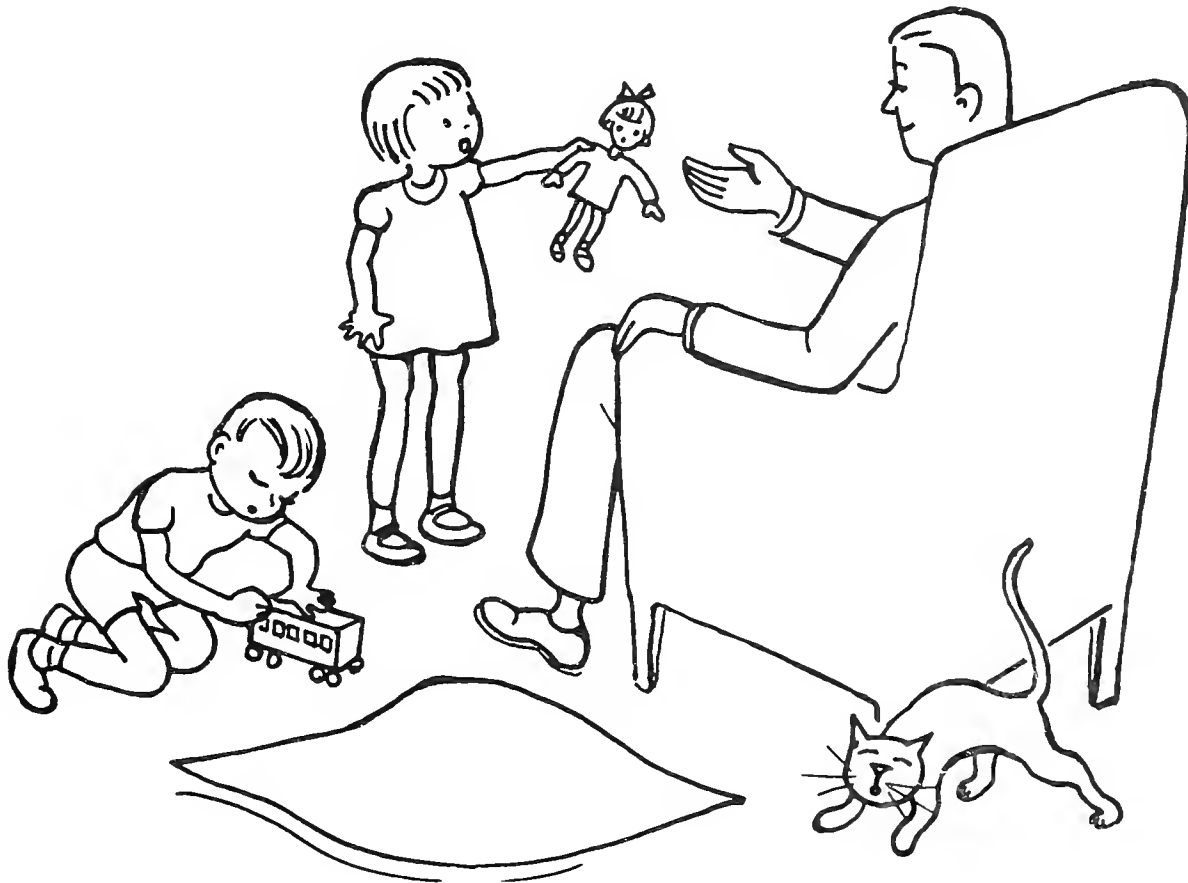
A woman gets ideas of what there is to do, of what she can do, of what she likes to do that is worth while. And in time she is able to make deliberate and intelligent choices.

The woman who has had some special experience or training before her children were born can hardly do more, while her children are little, than "keep her hand in." She may do this through reading, taking a course, going to concerts, designing and sewing the children's clothes, or subscribing to a technical journal, according to her own field of interest. Each woman must decide for herself how she will use the few precious minutes that she can control. Unless she tries to salvage these minutes and to use them deliberately they simply dribble away and leave her nothing to show for them.

When it comes to time, many of us remain forever like the small child with money in his hand: he lets the dimes and nickels slip through his fingers like dust and never has a lump large enough to use in a bigger, more satisfying way. Those who manage to save the odd minutes with some purpose usually find that they add up to something substantial over the years.

## what some have done

One young woman who lived in a large city started in a night school for one evening a week. She selected subjects in which she was interested but which would also add up credits toward her teacher's certificate. Her husband, meeting people all day in a bustling store, was glad to "sit" at home quietly with the children this one



night a week. This arrangement was so satisfactory that it was continued for several years. Of course, the credits toward her certificate added up very slowly, but her horizons kept expanding while she acquired new skills and good responsible working habits. By the time all her children were in school from nine to three each day, she enrolled for full-time work, so that two years later she got her certificate and a job in a nearby school. Her children are now in their teens and they have the "same working hours" as their mother. She spends a portion of her earnings to have someone come twice a



week to do a thorough cleaning and the ironing. The rest of the housekeeping she does herself with substantial assistance from her three teen-age children.

A mother of four children started out in an even smaller way. Trained as a librarian, she was not at all sure that she would want to go back to library work, or even could. But when the PTA of her children's school issued a call for a volunteer to help with the school library, she felt that she could give two half-days a week to her children's school. In the course of this work she found out a great deal about what sort of books children liked, what they didn't like, and what sort of books they wished they could find. She has now given over her desk at the library to a younger mother; she herself is writing children's books in her spare time. Since the children are older now, there is more time than there was; but, during the more crowded days, she was serving her apprenticeship without even realizing it.

A third woman wanted, while her children were very young, little more than "a legitimate excuse to get out of the house." Once a week she had a reliable woman come to take care of the children while she went out "for sociability and stimulation." She joined a morning class at the League of Women Voters, to meet with other intelligent, alert women and, incidentally, to educate herself politically. As the years went by, she took an interest and an increasing part in the other phases of this organization's work. Today she is doing valuable and exciting work helping other women to get a sounder understanding of our country's political, economic, social, and educational problems.

Still another woman, who had been a first-rate secretary before she married, has established a flourishing typing service. She, too, started out in the smallest possible way — first doing odd-jobs of typing at home whenever her former office was over-loaded with work. Then she typed the manuscript of a friend who had written a book. Presently so much work came her way that she farmed out the typing to other housewives in her neighborhood who had small stretches of time to use and wanted to use them profitably. Now she

es little or no typing herself, spending her time administering a  
ge and profitable business.

These jobs would not appeal to every woman, of course. Yet each woman found something that was right for her. Without being self-conscious about what she was doing and why, each of them remained *aware* — aware of her needs and the possibilities in the situation.

### **providing opportunities for others**

Another woman, in a housing development, worked up an administrative job through which she found employment and social contacts for many lonely young grandmothers and at the same time provided a much-needed service for the overworked, harrassed young mothers in the community. She had noticed, after living in the community for some time, that a number of grandmothers were living with their daughters or daughters-in-law. She noticed, too, that many of these women had little to do, for they could not help their daughters very much without developing some sort of friction.

This woman learned that many of the older women were excellent cooks. So, over a period of time, she worked up a cooking service which specialized in casseroles and other dishes that do not lose in quality through being reheated, but rather improve. At first she had a few women simply meet in her own kitchen. Now a special kitchen has been equipped, large enough for a number of women to work in at one time, and the enterprise is the pride and delight of the community. Here again, a woman used her imagination and ingenuity to deal with a situation and the material at hand. To be sure, she must have had other resources too; a real gift for getting along with all kinds of people, as well as the ability to organize and administer.

Incidentally, this woman made a clear step, in her small way, toward solving one of our pressing problems — that of using the time and energy of relatively idle women to spare the time and energy of others who are overworked. We need all kinds of services that will give the harrassed young housewife more stretches of free

time to use for herself. Mending services, dressmaking, hairdressing, manicures, darning, and other services, common household cleaning services are available in cities. Caterers supply services for special occasions, from a waitress or cook for a single meal to all the details for a wedding breakfast. Attempts have been made to deliver precooked foods to the door, as milk is now delivered. Such services get to be too expensive for most people, yet are just the kind that many women who have had experience in their own homes would be well qualified to furnish in a neighborhood.

### **part-time work an answer**

As women's lives gradually become more reasonably organized, they need the chance to work part time at something. At present, the very bitter choice for most women is All or Nothing. Being away from nine to five is simply too much. Nothing is obviously not enough.

For the great mass of women, the ideal situation is part-time work. More and more employment agencies are beginning to realize this, and some agencies specialize in part-time employment. Small business or professional offices could employ qualified workers as part-time bookkeepers, file clerks, receptionists, doctor's aides, laboratory technicians, and others. Many employers of larger establishments would gain from having two fresh eager persons working half-days in place of one working the full day. We might even ease the teacher-shortage if we sought new ways of using trained women who have less than full time to give. Many employers will have to experiment with more imaginative forms of administration in order to discover that employing larger numbers for short shifts is not only workable but advantageous.

Meanwhile, each woman has to approach any work she does with a sense of responsibility so as to keep the doors open for more and more women, each one trying to find the way to a richer, more creative and satisfying life.

# PUBLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLETS—4 for \$1

## Family Relations

239. The Shy Child
236. Too Young To Marry?
234. Coming of Age: Problems of Teenagers
231. How to Choose a Camp for Your Child
225. Your Child's Safety
223. Homes for Foster Children
219. How to Help Your Handicapped Child
216. How to Teach Your Child About Work
213. Saving Your Marriage
208. When Parents Grow Old
205. Do You Need A Lawyer?
204. If I Marry Outside My Religion
192. Democracy Begins in the Home
182. Getting Ready to Retire
178. Having a Baby
174. Mother-in-Law and Grandmother
173. So You Want to Adopt a Baby
163. 3 to 6: Your Child Starts to School
161. So You Think It's Love!
157. Making the Grade as Dad
155. Mental Health is a Family Affair
154. How to Discipline Your Children
149. How to Tell Your Child About Sex
148. Comics, Television, Radio, Movies
144. Understand Your Child—From 6 to 12
141. Enjoy Your Child—Ages 1, 2, and 3
136. Planning Your Family
135. Broken Homes
131. When You Grow Older
127. Keeping Up with Teen-Agers
113. Building Your Marriage

## Social Problems

246. The Enemy Property Issue
242. Money And Politics
241. The Case for Competition in Electric Power
240. Portrait of Israel—Myth or Reality
238. The Independent School
237. Economic Development and the World Bank
235. Is Disarmament Possible?
232. Back To What Woodshed?
230. Our Natural Resources
227. When Congress Investigates
226. The UN—10 Years of Achievement
224. What Makes a Volunteer?
221. When You Invest
217. Care for Children in Trouble
211. A Businessman Looks at Education
207. Children in Court
202. America's Immigration Policy

181. Politics is What You Make It
179. Loyalty in a Democracy
175. South Africa Today
162. This Land of Ours
114. Air Travel Comes of Age
97. The Challenge of Social Work
60. What Good Nursing Means to You

## Health and Science

243. Understanding Your Menopause
229. Psychologists in Action
228. New Medicines for the Mind
222. Footing the Hospital Bill
220. Cigarettes = Lung Cancer?
218. Meeting the Costs of Medical Care
215. Save Your Sight
214. The Challenge to Medical Education
212. Gains for Handicapped Children
210. The Retarded Child
201. Medical Research May Save Your Life
197. Doing Something for the Disabled
196. Mental Health—Everybody's Business
191. Science vs. Chiropractic
187. It's Your Hospital and Your Life!
184. How to Live with Heart Trouble
180. Your Neighbor's Health is Your Business
176. Something Can Be Done about Chronic Illness
172. When Mental Illness Strikes Your Family
166. Arthritis—Its Treatment and Problems
158. Cerebral Palsy—Its Scope and Management
156. T.B.—The Killer Cornered
150. Polio and the Salk Vaccine
147. Your Teeth—How to Save Them
139. Live Long and Like It
138. Good News About Diabetes
137. Know Your Heart
126. Rheumatic Fever
120. Toward Mental Health
118. Alcoholism—A Sickness That Can Be Beaten
101. The Story of Blue Cross
98. Epilepsy—The Ghost is Out of the Closet
38. Facing the Facts About Cancer
24. Syphilis: The Invader

## Intergroup Relations

245. Fear and Prejudice
244. What's Happening in School Integration?
233. Fair Play for All Americans
200. School to Job: Guidance for Minority Youth
95. The Negro in America
85. The Races of Mankind

Prepaid Postal on Reverse Side

☐ Please send me the following pamphlets from the above list. Order by number.

No. .... Quan. .... No. .... Quan. .... No. .... Quan. ....

No. .... Quan. .... No. .... Quan. .... No. .... Quan. ....

☐ Please enter my subscription for the next 30 Public Affairs Pamphlets for \$5.00.

☐ Please enter my subscription for the next 15 Public Affairs Pamphlets for \$3.00.

☐ Remittance enclosed. ☐ Please bill me. (In orders of \$1 or less, please send cash or stamps.)

Name .....

Organization .....

Street .....

City and State .....

## TS

Returned



1912



OCT 12 1966

1924

MITCHELL 2 9 '60



15 '87

0c

—

16c

est.

2

56

(R.)

Y.

**B U**  
**NO PO**

## Detach and Mail

PUBLIC AFFAIRS PAMPHLETS  
22 EAST 38th STREET  
NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

396  
6689m  
C-1  
Withdrawn from UF. Surveyed to Internet Archive

The modern mother's dilemma. main  
396G689m



3 1262 03259 6966

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
33✓

